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PROPOSALS

FOR PUBLISHING BY SUBSCRIPTION,

BY PETER HILL AT THE CROSS,

A NEW SYSTEM

OF THE

NATURAL HISTORY

OF

QUADRUPEDS, BIRDS, FISHES, AND INSECTS.

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CONDITIONS.

I. THIS Work will be printed in three Volumes Octavo, on a beautiful ſmall Type, and fine Paper.

II. The Three Volumes will contain a complete enumeration and deſcription of all the known Species in the animal kingdom, excepting Man.

III. They will afford a good deal of *new information* not to be ſound in any other Syſtem of Natural Hiſtory, but collected from the lateſt Voyages, Travels, and Original Hiſtorical Works; ſuch as Governor

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vernor Philips' Account of Botany Bay, Lieutenant Paterſon's Travels in Africa, Clavigero's Hiſtory of Mexico, Mr. Bruce's Travels *, &c. as well as from various other reſpectable ſources.

IV. Volume I. which is to contain Forty-five Plates, on which are delineated One Hundred and Ninety-four Quadrupeds (nearly as many as are repreſented in the whole Nine Volumes of the Tranſlation of Buffon), beautifully engraved by Mr. **Beugo**, with between Four and Five Hundred Pages of Letter-preſs, is now printing, and will be publiſhed about the 10th of March next. The Plates are already finiſhed, and Proofs of them are to be ſeen at Mr. **Hill**'s and the other Bookſellers ſhops.

V. The two ſubſequent Volumes, each containing nearly the ſame proportion of Plates and Letter-preſs, will be ſeparately publiſhed, each after an interval of three or four months.

VI. The price of each Volume to Subſcribers will be 10 s. 6 d. in boards, payable on delivery; and the Publiſher may ſafely venture to aſſert, that an *Original Work* ſo low priced, and at the ſame time on a plan ſo extenſive, elegant and uſeful, has ſcarce ever before been offered to the public. But as cheapneſs is ſo much conſulted in the publication by ſubſcription, the price muſt neceſſarily be raiſed after ſubſcribers are ſerved.

VII. Care will be taken to ſerve ſubſcribers with the beſt impreſſions of the Plates, in the order of their ſubſcription.

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* A Book which we are happy to underſtand will be publiſhed ſo ſoon, that we may avail ourſelves of whatever new information it may afford concerning the ſubjects of this Work.

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EDINBURGH,
Jan. 5. 1790.

THE following pages are intended to communicate ſome general ideas of the progreſs and the utility of the Science of Natural Hiſtory, and to explain the deſign of this Work. They afford alſo a ſpecimen of the Paper, the Type, and the ſtyle of Printing, which the Public are to expect in the Book itſelf.

PROSPECTUS;

EXHIBITING

A View of the Progreſs of Natural Hiſtory; pointing out the importance of the Study; and explaining the Deſign of the preſent Work.

Natural History has been more generally and more ſucceſsfully cultivated ſince the beginning of the preſent century than in any former period.

Among the ancients this ſcience remained in a very imperfect ſtate. Yet, they enjoyed ſome advantages peculiarly favourable to its cultivation. The Phœnicians, at an early period, opened a commercial intercourſe among nations widely diſtant from each other: The Aſſyrians, the Perſians, the Greeks, and the Romans, ſucceſſively united a great part of the world under one government; the different provinces of which would naturally have more frequent intercourſe with each other than ſeparate nations could: Alexander was at the pains to form a large collection of animals for the examination of his maſter Ariſtotle: Wild beaſts from every quarter of the globe were exhibited on the Roman amphitheatres.

Few, however, are the works on Natural Hiſtory which appear among the remains of ancient learning. In the writings of the poets, many images are introduced from external nature; and alluſions are frequently made to the manners and œconomy of animals: many of the tranſformations celebrated by Ovid are ſounded on facts in the natural hiſtory of animals and vegetables: Virgil, in his Georgics, deſcribes the œconomy of ſome of the tame animals, and of ſome parts of the vegetable kingdom. The proſe writers, too, occaſionally communicate facts of a ſimilar kind. But Ariſtotle and the elder Pliny are almoſt the only Greek or Roman authors who have attempted extenſive works on the Hiſtory of Nature. And even theſe, though ſew among the writers of antiquity are more highly or more deſervedly celebrated for genius, erudition, or ſcientific knowledge, neither uſe the ſtrict language of ſcience in their writings on ſubjects of Natural Hiſtory, nor confine themſelves to relate facts, the truth of which they had fully aſcertained. Pliny, in particular, ſeems to be but little concerned about truth, and chiefly deſirous to amuſe and aſtoniſh, by exhibiting things ſtrange and wonderful.

On the diſſolution of the Roman empire, the Arts and Sciences, many of which had from various cauſes already ſunk into a declining ſtate, were almoſt totally deſtroyed. In the hiſtory of ſociety, from the earlieſt ages down to the preſent period, ſcarce a ſimilar inſtance occurs of a conqueſt equally fatal to all that gives dignity and comfort to ſocial life, as that by which the Barbarians from the wilds of Scythia and Germany demoliſhed this mighty fabric, and eſtabliſhed themſelves on its ruins. In the ſtate in which ſociety remained in Europe for many centuries after this great event, it was impoſſible that the phœnomena of Nature, or the characters of the different orders of beings in the material world, could be carefully ſtudied or accurately aſcertained. Europe was then but thinly inhabited; the greateſt part of its lands was uncul-

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tivated: different nations had ſcarce any mutual intercourſe: and the Chriſtian world was almoſt wholly ſecluded from communication with the inhabitants of thoſe countries in which other forms of ſuperſtition prevailed;—for even Chriſtianity was then groſs ſuperſtition: All, in ſhort, was ignorance, wonder and credulity.

Natural Hiſtory was not one of the favourite ſtudies of the Revivers of Literature. Juriſprudence, the quirks of logic, and the myſtic ſubtleties of divinity, were in that age the great objects of literary and ſcientific purſuit. By degrees other ſtudies as well as theſe came into notice. But ſtill, the only ſtudies that were highly valued, or thought worthy of eager purſuit, were ſuch as had been moſt ſucceſsfully cultivated, and held in the higheſt eſtimation among the ancients. Veneration for Ariſtotle and Pliny at length induced ſome to engage in a ſtudy which *they* had cultivated. But thoſe who at this time turned their attention to Natural Hiſtory were rather claſſical ſcholars than men of ſcience: they contented themſelves with commenting on the writings of their maſters, or adding to the confuſed heap of ſuſpicious facts which *they* had collected, others not better aſcertained, and often more improbable.

The ſcholars of that period, however, diſplayed a degree of induſtry which to the triflers of the preſent day may well appear incredible. The celebrated naturaliſt *Aldrovandus* is an illuſtrious inſtance. It is pleaſing to find a perſon engaging in theſe purſuits with ſuch enthuſiaſm, and proſecuting them with ſuch perſeverance. His voluminous works are a proof of amazing induſtry. He ſpent his whole life and fortune in the cultivation of Natural Hiſtory. He travelled into the moſt remote countries, to examine what natural productions they afforded; employed the moſt ſkilful artiſts, at a great expence, to draw and engrave repreſentations of natural objects; and collected from preceding writers every thing, whether alluſions, deſcriptions, fables, proverbs, or hieroglyphics, that could contribute in any degree, to illuſtrate the characters of the ſubjects which he undertook to deſcribe. His volumes are too ponderous, and his information too multifarious and inaccurate. But it is impoſſible to examine his works, or reflect upon his character, without regarding him with veneration and gratitude.

Towards the end of the laſt century this ſcience began to be more generally cultivated: men began to examine the features of Nature with greater fondneſs and curioſity. It was found, that the inartificial and diſorderly arrangement followed by the ancient writers on Natural Hiſtory was highly unfavourable to the improvement of the ſtudy; and Naturaliſts therefore ſought to reduce their Science to Syſtematic regularity. Several of the firſt attempts were far from happy. They introduced into Natural Hiſtory the auſterity of method, and the barbarous obſcurity of technical language, without conferring on it the advantages of a truly ſcientific order; they only rendered confuſion more perplexing and intricate. One, however, was ſtill improving on another. The progreſs of the Arts and Sciences, the gradual extenſion of the limits of civilization, the improvement of commerce and navigation, with a variety of other cauſes, the operation of which is peculiar to the preſent age, have ſince concurred to promote the advancement of this branch of knowledge. It has at length obtained all the advantages of ſyſtematic order and ſcientific accuracy, through the labours of a band of philoſophers highly illuſtrious for their abilities, and unwearied, diſintereſted exertions for its improvement. Among our countrymen, Ray, Woodward, Collinſon and Edwards, have proſecuted this ſtudy with ſingular ſucceſs, and have been

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followed in the ſame tract by many others ſcarce inferior in induſtry or abilities; none of whom has been more ſucceſsful than the indefatigable Pennant. But the celebrated Linnæus of Sweden is generally and juſtly allowed to have ſucceeded better than any other Naturaliſt in forming Natural Hiſtory into a ſyſtem; and may therefore be conſidered perhaps as its beſt benefactor. The eloquent Buffon, again, has contributed in a ſignal manner to the popularity of the ſcience by his work, in which he has ſo happily united truth with elegance;—a work which ſeems almoſt to combine the oppoſite advantages of the inartificial and entertaining manner of Pliny with thoſe of the auſtere, ſyſtematic arrangement of the moderns. But, whatever the advantages of this mode of writing on Natural Hiſtory, Pennant may poſſibly be conſidered as having improved even on Buffon.

Such has been the progreſs of this Science. In the infancy of the other Sciences and the Arts it has never been cultivated as a diſtinct province of philoſophy. Even among enlightened nations, and in highly civilized periods, it has remained in a low ſtate. But as mankind advance in knowledge, and as the Arts are multiplied and raiſed to higher perfection, the appearances of Nature are contemplated with more curioſity, and examined in a more deliberate and accurate manner. It was in the moſt illuſtrious periods of Greek and Roman learning that Natural Hiſtory was moſt induſtriouſly cultivated among the ancients. In the preſent age, in which Philoſophy and Polite Literature are more generally cultivated through Europe, and have been carried to higher perfection than perhaps in any former æra in the hiſtory of ſociety, this branch of Science partakes of the ſplendour and the honours which diſtinguiſh its other branches; is cultivated with the ſame eagerneſs, and with the ſame ſucceſs.

Natural Hiſtory is indeed ſo intimately connected with all the other Sciences, and with all the Arts, from the ſimpleſt and rudeſt to the moſt complex and elegant, that it could never at any period in the exiſtence of ſociety be totally neglected. We *muſt* look around us: we cannot avoid becoming more or leſs acquainted with the manners of animals, the œconomy of vegetables, and the general appearances of nature. Even the rudeſt and moſt unenlightened ſavages muſt be acquainted at leaſt with a few natural objects. In the hunting and in the ſhepherd ſtates, the manners of various animals, and ſome of the more general phœnomena of the vegetable kingdom, are obſerved. Arts are invented as Nature becomes better known. The huſbandman needs to know the characters of the tame animals which he employs, the qualities of the ſoil which he cultivates, and the nature of the grain which he raiſes. Even the meaneſt mechanic muſt have an accurate knowledge of many of the qualities of thoſe natural objects with which his art is connected. Natural Hiſtory affords the materials of which Science of every kind is formed. The Fine Arts, though uſually conſidered as the peculiar province of imagination, depend greatly upon Natural Hiſtory. The poet, the painter, and the ſculptor, profeſs to imitate nature. In order to ſucceed in their imitations, they need to be well acquainted with their patterns. The poet, in particular, muſt have a vaſt ſtore of images conſtantly at command, to enable him to enchant and to aſtoniſh; and theſe he can collect no where but from the ſources of Natural Hiſtory. Modern poets have not the ſame machinery of Gods and Goddeſſes, Nymphs and Fauns, and Satyrs, which were ſo ſerviceable to the heathen poets of antiquity; neither can they employ Elves or Witches, or the wonders of enchantment, with ſo much advantage as Shakeſpeare or the writers of the old romances. Let them therefore be more induſtrious in ſtudying the ſcenes of Nature. Theſe are ſo endleſsly diverſified, that they muſt always continue to afford abundance of the richeſt materials for the poet's Art.

A ſcience ſo intimately connected with all the neceſſary and the fine Arts, forming the baſis of the other Sciences, and more uſeful than any of them for the ordinary purpoſes of life, can never be too generally or too induſtriouſly cultivated. It is with the utmoſt propriety that books on Natural Hiſtory are put into the hands of the young. If they can be rendered intereſting, they muſt be uſeful. Thoſe therefore who have ſought to maintain and extend the popularity of the ſcience by diveſting it of the auſterities of ſyſtem, and preſenting it to the beginner, unincumbered with technical language, have employed their induſtry in a happy direction. Their labours have been highly ſerviceable, and have been received by the world with the favour which they have merited.

Still, however, there ſeems to be room for ſomething more in this way. Notwithſtanding our eſteem for Pennant and Buffon, we cannot help thinking that ſomewhat may yet be done to render Natural Hiſtory a popular ſtudy: their works, though pleaſing, are rather too voluminous for the reader who is to be courted and allured to ſtudy. He may begin with eagerneſs; he may proceed for a while with delight; but there is ſome reaſon to ſuſpect, that unleſs animated with a *ſtrong* deſire for the acquiſition of this ſpecies of knowledge, he may lay them aſide, and forget to take them up, long before he has thoroughly peruſed them. There are, indeed, ſmaller compends of Natural Hiſtory, and particularly of the natural hiſtory of animals; but we know of none ſuch, that either for accuracy of information, or correctneſs of compoſition,

poſition, or for any other of the qualities requiſite in a work of this kind, can be thought worthy of the eſteem of the Public.

Theſe conſiderations have ſuggeſted the idea of a work to which the patronage of the Public is now ſolicited. It was thought that the natural hiſtory of animals, the moſt entertaining, and perhaps the moſt uſeful branch of the ſtudy, might be recommended, more effectually than it has yet been, to general attention, "by "ſelecting as the ſubjects of hiſtorical deſcription ſuch "animals as, either from their holding a more eminent "rank among the brute creation, from their being par"ticularly ſerviceable to man, or from ſome other cir"cumſtances influencing their character, are moſt wor"thy of notice, and moſt likely to intereſt the obſerver; "proceeding with theſe in a regular, ſyſtematic order; "giving the names which they have received from the "moſt reſpectable ſyſtematic writers on natural hiſtory, "in their ſyſtems of claſſification; and explaining their "characters with as much ſimplicity and elegance of ex"preſſion, and as much certainty of information, as we "could poſſibly attain." Many animals, however they may engage the curioſity of the profeſſed naturaliſt, afford nothing in their hiſtory that can intereſt the beginner in the ſtudy, or the ordinary reader: Of many, little more than the names, form, and colours is known; and the hiſtory of theſe laſt, however entertaining it may prove when the induſtry of Naturaliſts ſhall have made it fully known, cannot at preſent afford much entertainment. To render ſuch a work more valuable, it was thought that it might, now and then, be proper to intermix Philoſophy with ſimple narrative,—to collect at proper intervals particular facts into one general view; not however in an abſtruſe or aſſuming manner,

ner, but in that ſimple, modeſt form in which true Philoſophy is beſt pleaſed to appear.

Theſe were indeed the views upon which the preſent work was undertaken: But we cannot boaſt that it is executed in ſuch a manner as fully to anſwer theſe views. In forming deſigns, the general, the ſtateſman, the author, the artiſt of whatever denomination, are apt to rely too much on their own powers, and on the concurrence of favourable circumſtances. That which diſplayed elegance and ſplendour when it exiſted only in idea, becomes often mean and uncouth when brought into real exiſtence. On the preſent occaſion, however, no pains have been ſpared. Moſt of the beſt writers on the Natural Hiſtory of Animals, as well ancients as moderns, have been diligently peruſed; and every additional fact that ſeemed of ſufficient importance, has been induſtriouſly gleaned from the lateſt Voyages and Travels. Theſe have not been implicitly truſted to. Every opportunity has been eagerly taken of learning the manners and œconomy of the different animals from actual obſervation; and the ſpecimens in ſuch collections of the ſubjects of Natural Hiſtory as we could obtain acceſs to, have been carefully inſpected. The arrangement of Pennant, improved from Ray, is nearly followed; as appearing liable to fewer objections than any other with which we are acquainted. Though we enter in a particular manner into the hiſtory of none but the more remarkable animals; yet all the known animals belonging to the different Orders are enumerated.

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